

NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



BROWN COUNTY VETERANS COFFEE

In conjunction with the Brown County Veterans monthly coffee, CVSO Aaron Walberg hosted a VA Town Hall.

Over 50 veterans were in attendance and heard updates from CVSO Walberg, as well as leadership from the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System and the VA Regional Office.

During this month's coffee, veterans in attendance recognized and applauded VSO Walberg for being named "CTVSO of the Year."

Issues discussed during the coffee were: the new CBOC in Aberdeen, RAMP program, paperless claims, decision ready claims, rating schedules, VA copays, state veterans cemetery, chiropractic care, massage therapy, and ID cards.



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MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY ZIMMERMAN

Just Get 'Er Done!

Autumn is here, and harvest is just around the corner. These Fall days are a great time to complete those cleaning tasks you have been putting off. As a veteran, it's also a great time to review your chore list.

- Locate your discharge papers. These papers are needed to verify military service for healthcare benefits, retirement, employment, education benefits and burial benefits.
- Record your discharge papers with the local county register of deeds. It costs nothing, and they are then on file for you or your family to retrieve when needed.
- Locate and visit your local county or tribal veterans service office (<https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/veteransserviceofficers/locatevso.aspx>) or our claims office (2501 W. 22nd Street) in Sioux Falls. Benefits and services are ever-changing. It is important for you to have that constant contact with these experts.
- Study agent orange and burn pit materials. Sign in on the registries. It is important that this exposure is identified and documented.
- Schedule your yearly physical. Don't forget to share information on flashbacks, anxiety and nightmares with your doctor.
- Prepare a will.
- Share your stories. Your stories are a legacy. They can awaken future generations to their potential and provide them with a better understanding of sacrifices made.
- Participate in sendoff and welcome home events. Share those five important words – "thank you for your service." Take advantage of every opportunity to make a positive impact on others. No soldier stands alone. Assist them with transition from military to civilian life.

Combat is a team sport where no one goes it alone. Regardless of rank, branch or specialty, a servicemember is always a servicemember. We are all on the same team and we all have the camaraderie of knowing what it is like to put our lives on hold and fight for our country.



“Get-Er-Done!”

ELECTRONIC VOTER REGISTRATION FOR UOCAVA VOTERS

The General Election (November 6, 2018) is less than ten weeks away and absentee voting begins on September 21st. Our Electronic Voter Registration (ELVR) and Absentee Ballot Application System for Uniformed and Overseas Citizens worked great in the June Primary Election. This system can be accessed at the following link: <https://elvr.sdsos.gov/>

The site can also be accessed through our website on the Military Members page in the Election Section: <https://sdsos.gov/elections-voting/voting/military-members.aspx>

The UOCAVA ELVRS allows all voters covered under UOCAVA that possess an active South Dakota driver license to register to vote and submit an application for an absentee ballot electronically through this system. This system will save time for these individuals to submit a voter registration form and/or submit an absentee ballot application request to their county auditor. Individuals can also choose to receive their ballot electronically when they fill out the absentee ballot application portion of this system (only primary and general election ballots can be sent to the voter electronically). The application for an absentee ballot is good for the calendar year in which it is signed.



Please note that the deadline for voter registration for the 2018 General Election is October 22, 2018. Individuals can request an absentee ballot up until 5 PM local time the day prior to the election, however one must consider the time that it will take for their ballot to get back to their county auditor by mail, as it must be in the auditor's office by election day.

Lastly, a reminder that individuals may track their absentee ballot status using our Voter Information Portal <https://sos.sd.gov/Elections/VIPLogin.aspx> including:

- when the absentee ballot application is received by the auditor's office
- when the absentee ballot is sent to the voter, and
- when the voted absentee ballot was received by the county auditor

The link to 2018 General Election Ballot Question Informational Pamphlet can be found at: <https://sdsos.gov/elections-voting/assets/2018BQPamphlet.pdf>

SFVAHS FLU SHOT CLINICS

Flu Shots for Veterans:

Aberdeen CBOC

- September 26, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
- October 23, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

Spirit Lake CBOC

- October 11, 12N-3:30 p.m.
- October 24, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Wagner Outreach Clinic

- October 3, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.
- October 24, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

Watertown CBOC

- October 9, 8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.
- October 26, 8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Sioux City CBOC

- October 2, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

Sioux Falls VA Medical Center – All flu shot clinics will take place in the primary care conference room on 2nd floor of the primary care addition, accessible by elevator or the stairs from the front foyer.

- September 27, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
- October 2, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
- October 12, 7:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
- October 15, 7:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
- October 25, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
- November 7, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
- November 13, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
- December 3, 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
- December 13, 7:30 a.m.-12 noon

As soon as the flu vaccine arrives, enrolled Veterans will again be able to receive flu shots during regularly scheduled appointments at the medical center and CBOCs. The annual Walgreens and VA Retail Immunization Care Coordination Program that provides no-cost flu vaccinations to Veterans through 8200 Walgreens locations is now active and giving vaccinations.



VETERANS HONOR BANNERS



Scenic drives in Rapid City have been enriched! Bill Casper, chairman of the Veteran's Honor Banner project in Rapid City notes they will be hanging 72 five-foot by two-foot honoring banners of veterans from all conflicts including WWI.



They will start adding these banners on October 10. In November they will be adding 18 three-foot by two-foot banners for a grand total of 90 banners. The banners will hang in the Main Street and Saint Joseph Street area.

SDDVA AT THE FAIR

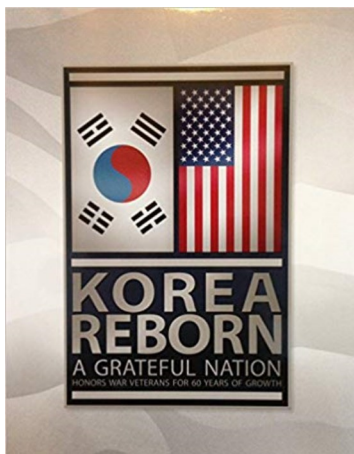
This past weekend, SDDVA staff and CTVSOs worked a booth in the Veterans Building at the South Dakota State Fair in Huron. Veterans service organizations also had booths and representation during the five-days.

SDDVA is honored to have this opportunity to visit with veterans and their families. Issues addressed during the Fair were: compensation benefits, pension benefits, state veterans home, hearing loss claims, health care benefits, and medal requests. Staff also used this time to thank veterans for their service and

provide them with brochures and pamphlets on the programs and services available to them.



This year's theme for the Fair was "Experience the Magic," and some veterans got to see that magic in progress as claims were filed for them during their visit to the booth. The Department also distributed copies of the Korea Reborn books to veterans and families. SDDVA has a large supply of these books, please let us know if you need any for your offices or veterans.



MISSION ACT REQUIRES VA RELEASE DATA ON VACANCIES

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released its figures on employment vacancies as of June 30, as mandated each quarter under the recently passed MISSION Act. The VA reported the following vacancies: 45,239 overall vacancies at the department, out of a total of 419,353 full-time authorized and budgeted positions. This overall number of vacancies includes:

- 40,456 vacancies in the Veterans Health Administration, out of a total of 375,953 full-time authorized and budgeted positions
- 1,978 vacancies in the Veterans Benefits Administration, out of a total of 25,560 full-time authorized and budgeted positions
- 233 vacancies in the National Cemetery Administration, out of a total of 2,179 full-time authorized and budgeted positions
- 2,572 vacancies in the department's staff offices, out of a total of 15,661 full-time authorized and budgeted positions

"President Trump has made it clear that achieving the optimal workforce at the VA is a top priority as we look to provide the best care and benefits to our nation's heroes," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "My priority has been to have a clear and accurate picture of our vacancies, and getting this information out publicly is an important step in transparency to veterans and taxpayers."

With approximately 374,000 current employees, the VA is the second largest federal organization in the United States. From the start of fiscal year (FY) 2014 to the end of FY 2017, the VA achieved a growth rate of 12.5% and an average annual turnover (i.e., total loss) rate of 9.2%. The VA turnover rates compare favorably with other large cabinet-level agencies, which averaged 11% in FY 2017.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is the largest administration within the VA, accounting for approximately 335,000 of VA's 374,000 employees. VHA turnover rates compare favorably with the healthcare industry, including for those occupations identified as mission critical. In FY 2017, VHA's annual turnover rate for full-time and part-time employees was 9.1%, which compares well to the healthcare industry turnover rate of 20-30%.

There is a consistent turnover of employees in large organizations such as VHA due to normal retirements and job changes. Vacancies represent current unencumbered positions due to turnover and new positions that are planned to meet an anticipated growth in services. VHA has approximately 40,000 vacancies, which is consistent with the historical annual 9% turnover rate and a 2-3% growth rate.

Staffing plans consider normal rates of workforce turnover, retirement, and growth, and the expectation that there will always be vacant positions. Each year, VHA hires more employees than it loses to replace turnover and keep up with the growth in demand for services.

VA VACANCY DATA (CONTINUED)

The best indicators of adequate staffing levels include veteran access to care and health care outcomes—not vacancies:

- VA now provides same-day services for care needs right away at all primary care and mental health clinics.
- In FY18 to date, 21% of all appointments have been completed the same day that the appointment was requested.
- The average time it took to complete an urgent referral to a specialist has decreased from 19.3 days in FY14 to 3.2 days in FY17 and 2.0 days in FY18 - this number continues to improve now down to 1.3 days during July of 2018.
- VA completed 95% of follow-up appointments no later than the provider recommended date for time sensitive appointments in FY to date.
- According to a recent [RAND Corp. study](#), Veterans receive the same or better care at VA medical centers as patients at non-VA hospitals.
- For inpatient care specifically, VA hospitals performed on average the same or significantly better than non-VA hospitals on 21 of 26 measures.
- VA performed significantly better than commercial and Medicaid Health Maintenance Organizations on 28 of 30 measures, with no difference on the other two.
- Although there was variation in performance across the VA, the variation was even wider among non-VA hospitals.

VHA's workforce challenges mirror those of the health care industry as a whole. There is a national shortage of healthcare professionals, especially for physicians and nurses. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing, Association of American Medical Colleges, and other national healthcare organizations have written about this workforce shortage at length.

VHA remains fully engaged in a fiercely competitive clinical recruitment market. VA has been successful in this fight – it has increased its number of clinical providers including hard-to-recruit-and-retain physicians such as psychiatrists.

VHA is taking a number of key steps to attract qualified candidates:

- Mental health and other targeted hiring initiatives,
- Increased maximum physician salaries,
- Utilization of recruitment/relocation and retention (3Rs) incentives and the Education Debt Reduction Program (EDRP),
- Targeted nationwide recruitment advertising and marketing,
- The "Take A Closer Look at VA" trainee outreach recruitment program,
- Expanding opportunities for telemedicine providers,
- DoD/VA effort to recruit transitioning service members, and
- Exhibiting regularly at key healthcare conferences and job fairs.

VA VACANCY DATA (CONTINUED)

The Mission Act also provides additional authority that the VA will leverage for recruitment and retention of medical professionals, including:

- Initiating a pilot scholarship program targeted toward veterans for medical school education,
- Increasing the maximum award amount for the Education Debt Reduction Program (EDRP), and expanding program eligibility to additional mental health providers, and
- Offering recent medical school graduates loan repayment opportunities in exchange for service in the VA Medical Centers through the Specialty Education Loan Repayment Program (SELRP).

Together, these tools expand the VA's already robust and aggressive staffing initiatives to retain high-quality providers for our veterans.

"Despite a challenging and ultra-competitive market for filling health care positions across the country, the VA has worked with Congress and other key stakeholders to deploy a number of new and important tools to help us reduce our vacancies," said Secretary Wilkie. "We are always looking for new ways to recruit high-quality talent, and will continue to do everything we can to provide the best quality care for our nation's Veterans."

The VA is continuously recruiting for committed professionals who are dedicated to serving our nation's veterans. Employment at the VA provides a good salary, comprehensive benefits and great work/life balance. Above all else, the highest honor in working at the VA is the opportunity to serve the brave men and women who have served our country. Additional information regarding careers at VA can be found at <https://www.vacareers.va.gov/>.

FOWLER AND OLIVIER ATTEND NATIONAL SAA TRAINING

SDDVA's Shane Olivier and Ryan Fowler attended the 2018 National Association of State Approving Agencies summer conference in California last week.

State SAAs were briefed on automation, technology, legislative activities, compliance surveys, Eforce compliance and approvals, agency management, flight school approvals, Valor Act, contract and compilation reports.

Shane and Ryan are always available to visit with CTVSOs, veterans, employers and educational partners about the benefits, programs, and services available to our veterans and their families.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Sept 7—Veterans Fall Benefit Fair—Moose Lodge (516 W. 15th Avenue) - Mitchell—2:00 pm—6:00 pm (CT)
 Sept 7-9—PVA North Central Chapter Trap Shoot—Crooks Gun Club
 Sept 10—Doug Brown Memorial Pheasant Hunt—Top Gun Hunting Ranch—Howard
 Sept 11—Improving Veterans Care Conference—BHSU (4300 Cheyenne Boulevard) - Rapid City
 Sept 13—Veterans Free Drop In Legal Clinic—VABHHC - Hot Springs (500 North 5th Street) 9:00 am—3:00 pm (MT)
 Sept 14—Veterans Free Drop In Legal Clinic—Legion Post 22—Rapid City (818 E. St. Patrick) 9:00 am—3:00 pm (MT)
 Sept 14—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
 Sept 21—7th Annual POW/MIA Program—Sioux Falls Veterans Memorial Park (1021 W. Bailey Street) 6:30 pm (CT)
 Sept 21—Veterans Stand Down—VFW (3601 S. Minnesota Avenue) - Sioux Falls—9:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
 Oct 5-7—VFW Council of Administration—Cedar Shores Resort—Oacoma
 Oct 6—VFW State Commander/Aux. President Homecoming—Cedar Shores Resort—Oacoma
 Oct 6—VA Women Veterans Conference—Central Church (3100 W. Ralph Rogers Rd.—Sioux Falls) - 9:00 am (CT)
 Oct 8—Native American Heritage Day (state offices closed)
 Oct 10—SD Veterans Commission Meeting—RedRossa Grille—Pierre—8:00 am (CT)
 Oct 12-13—DAV Fall Conference—DAV Dept. Headquarters (1519 W. 51st Street) - Sioux Falls
 Oct 19—Open House new Spirit Lake CBOC—3:00 pm (CT)
 Nov 11—Veterans Day Community Program—Lincoln High School—Sioux Falls—10:30 am (CT)
 Nov 11—Veterans Day Last Call Ceremony—SFVAHCS—1:30 pm (CT)
 Nov 12—State Offices Closed
 Nov 16—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs —10:00 am (MT)
 Nov 16—Dakota Dunes CBOC Open House—2:00 pm (CT)
 Dec 4—Governor's Budget Address—State Capitol—1:00 pm (CT)
 Jan 8—Governor's State of the State—State Capitol—1:00 pm (CT)
 Jan 13-18—VFW Accredited Service Officer Training—Annapolis, MD
 Mar 3-7—VFW Legislative Conference
 July 20-24—National VFW Convention—Orlando, FL



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